

**James Madison to Thomas Cooper, March 22, 1824.
Transcription: The Writings of James Madison,
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TO THOMAS COOPER.¹

¹ From the original kindly contributed by Miss Sally J. Newman, "Hilton," Va.

Montpellier, Mar. 23, 1824.

Dear Sir. I have rec'd the little pamphlet on the Tariff before Congress, which you were so good as to send me.¹ I had previously read its contents in the Newspapers; but they are well worth possessing in the other form you have given them.

¹ *On the proposed alteration of the tariff submitted to the consideration of the members of South Carolina in the ensuing Congress.* Columbia, 1824.

I have always concurred in the general principle that industrious pursuits of individuals ought to be left to individuals, as most capable of choosing & managing them. And this policy is certainly most congenial with the spirit of a free people, & particularly due to the intelligent & enterprising citizens of the U. States.

The true question to be decided therefore is, what are the exceptions to the rule, not incompatible with its generality; and what the reasons justifying them. That there are such cases, seems to be not sufficiently impressed on some of the opponents of the Tariff. Its votaries on the other hand, some of them at least, convert the exceptions into the rule, & would make the Government, a general supervisor of individual concerns. The length

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to which they push their system, is involving it in complexities & inconsistencies, which can hardly fail to end in great modifications, if not total miscarriage. What can be more incongruous than to tax raw material in an act for encouraging manufactures, or than to represent a temporary protection of them, as ensuring an early competition & reduction of prices; and at the same time to require for their safety, a progressive augmentation of the protecting import. I know not a better service, that could be rendered to the science of political economy, than a judicious explanation of the 3 cases constituting exceptions to the principle of free industry which as a general principle, has been so unanswerably established. You have glanced at some of them, among others that may be added. I would admit cases in which there could be scarce a doubt, that a manufacture, once brought into activity, would support itself, & be profitable to the nation. An example is furnished by the Cotton branch among ourselves, which if it had not been stimulated by the effect of the late war, might not for a considerable time have sprung up, and which with that impulse, has already reached a maturity, which not only supplies

the home market, but faces its rivals in foreign ones. To guard the example however, against fallacious inferences, it has been well observed, that the manufactories in this case, owe their great success to the advantage they have, in the raw material, and to the extraordinary proportion of the work, which is performed by mechanical agency. Is it not fair also, in estimating the comparative cost of domestic and foreign products, to take into view the effect of wars, even foreign wars, on the latter?

Were there a certainty of perpetual peace, & still more, a universal freedom of commerce, the theory might hold good without exception, that Government should never bias individuals in the choice of their occupation. But such a millenium has not yet arrived, and experience shows, that if peace furnishes supplies from abroad, cheaper than they can be made at home, the cost in war, may exceed that at which they could be afforded at home, whilst it can not be expected, that a home provision will be undertaken in war, if the return of peace is to break down the undertakers. It would seem reasonable therefore, that the war price should be compared with the peace price, and the war periods with the peace

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periods, which in the last century have been nearly equal, & that from these data, should be deduced the tax, that could be afforded in peace, in order to avoid the tax imposed by war.

In yielding thus much to the patrons of domestic manufacturers, they ought to be reminded in every doubtful case, the Government should forbear to intermeddle; and that particular caution should be observed, where one part of the community would be favored at the expense of another. In Governments, independent of the people, the danger of oppression is from the will of the former. In Governments, where the will of the people prevails, the danger of injustice arises from the interest, real or supposed, which a majority may have in trespassing on that of the minority. This danger, in small Republics, has been conspicuous.

The extent & peculiar structure of ours, are the safeguards on which we must rely, and altho' they may occasionally somewhat disappoint us, we have a consolation always, in the greater abuses inseparable from Governments less free, and in the hope also, that the progress of political Science, and the lessons of experience will not be lost on the National Council.

With great esteem & cordial respect.